

the guardian weekly

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Level » Advanced

Style » Individual or group activities



Welcome to the Guardian Weekly's special news-based materials to support learners and teachers of English. Each month, the Guardian Weekly newspaper selects topical news articles that can be used to practise English language skills. The materials are graded for two levels: Advanced and Lower Intermediate. These worksheets can be downloaded free from guardian.co.uk/weekly/. You can also find more advice for teachers and learners from the Guardian Weekly's Learning English section on the site.

Materials prepared by Janet Hardy-Gould

Veteran explorer to try record winter Antarctic trek



Never too old ... Sir Ranulph Fiennes during his 2008 Everest expedition PA

Before reading

1 The article is about an explorer called Sir Ranulph Fiennes who was the first to cross both polar ice caps. Work in small groups. Decide what these explorers/adventurers were the first to do. You can see pictures of them on page 4

- a Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay
- b Junko Tabei
- c Neil Armstrong
- d Roald Amundsen
- e Ferdinand Magellan
- f Vasco de Gama

2 Vocabulary from the article. Work with a partner and check the verbs in a dictionary. Underline the two verbs which you think won't appear in the text. Why?

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| achieve | relax |
| attempt | traverse |
| climb | trek |
| conquer | set sail |
| descend | starve |
| freeze | stroll |
| plummet | suffer |

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Article

Veteran explorer to try record winter Antarctic trek

- 1 The appalling challenge of a six-month, 3,200km walk across the south pole, in the perpetual darkness of the Antarctic winter when temperatures can plummet to -90C, proved irresistible to the veteran British explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes.
- 2 Fiennes's hero, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, wrote "great God, this is an awful place" when he reached the south pole a century ago, before freezing and starving to death with his team on the return journey.
- 3 That journey was made in summer. Nobody before has attempted, still less achieved, crossing the pole in winter. In a statement, Fiennes said: "This will be my greatest challenge to date. We will stretch the limits of human endurance."
- 4 However, Fiennes could not explain why anyone should contemplate such a venture, still less a man aged 68 who has survived cancer, heart surgery and the loss of most of the frozen fingertips on one hand. "It's what I do," he told a press conference in London last month.
- 5 Fiennes - the world's greatest living explorer, according to the Guinness Book of Records - was the first to cross the Antarctic continent unsupported; the first to cross both polar ice caps; the oldest to climb Everest, conquering it in 2009 aged 65 on his third attempt, after suffering a heart attack on his first; and the first to traverse the globe from pole to pole.
- 6 He admitted his wife, Louise, and six-year-old daughter are not thrilled. "But I've never done anything else, it's how I earn my living. And you're much more likely, statistically, to die on the roads [in the UK] than on the polar ice."
- 7 After training in the Swedish Arctic in a relatively

balmy -40C, his team will set sail from London on 6 December on a South African research ship.

- 8 The ice trek proper will begin on 21 March, the equinox that marks the official start of the polar winter, from the Russian base of Novolazarevskaya. Fiennes and his five team members must then climb more than 3,000 metres on to the inland plateau, trek for several hundred kilometres using an ice tractor to pull all the supplies and equipment they need, descend another 3,000 metres and cross the Ross Ice Shelf.
- 9 If they reach Scott's old base at McMurdo Sound by the spring equinox six months later, they will still have to wait for months until the sea ice retreats enough for their ship to collect them.

Maev Kennedy

Glossary

appalling (adjective) extremely bad

venture (noun) a project or activity, especially one which involves taking risks

endurance (noun) the ability to continue doing something difficult or painful for a long time

equinox (noun) one of the two times of the year when the sun is above the equator and day and night are of the same length

balmy (adjective) warm and pleasant

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While reading

1 Read the article and choose the correct answer.

1 Fiennes is attempting to cross the south pole:

- a ☐ on the same route as Captain Scott.
- b ☐ by himself during the winter months.
- c ☐ on foot during the worst season.
- d ☐ by ice tractor for most of the 3,200km.

2 During his life, Fiennes has:

- a ☐ had only one major health problem.
- b ☐ lost some of the fingers on one hand.
- c ☐ reached the top of Everest three times.
- d ☐ been named as the most significant living explorer.

3 Fiennes is going on this expedition because:

- a ☐ it is something he has always done as a career.
- b ☐ he wishes to inspire his family.
- c ☐ he wants to travel with his wife and daughter.
- d ☐ he would like to improve his health.

4 The expedition will:

- a ☐ begin at an Antarctic base belonging to Sweden.
- b ☐ involve climbing and descending a high plateau.
- c ☐ start and finish exactly at the two equinoxes.
- d ☐ finish with a few weeks' wait for a boat.

2 Read the text again and answer the questions.

- a What words and phrases are used in the first two paragraphs to convey the terrible conditions in the Antarctic?

- b How does the writer contrast Fiennes' journey with Scott's original expedition?

- c What technique is used in paragraph five to highlight Fiennes' endless achievements?

- d Why is the Swedish Arctic described as "a relatively balmy -40C"?

- e What is the effect of the very long sentence at the end of paragraph eight?

3 Work with a partner. Look back at the text and write down six adjectives that you think describe Fiennes' character, eg brave, committed ... Compare your list with another pair.

After reading

1 Complete the summary with the correct form of the verbs.

attempt to, become, climb, consider, cross, do, trek

Many people (a) Sir Ranulph Fiennes to be one of the greatest living explorers. During his lifetime he (b) both polar ice caps and he (c) across the Antarctic continent without support. In 2009 he (d) Everest at the age of 65

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and (e) the oldest person ever to achieve this feat. Next year, he (f) walk across the Antarctic during the winter months - a journey which nobody (g) before.

Activity - discussion

Modern exploration

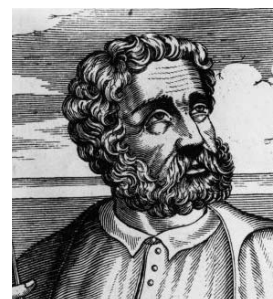
Read the statements below and write agree [A] or disagree [D]. Then compare and justify your choice in small groups.

- a ☐ Fiennes is inspirational. He demonstrates how we can overcome extreme difficulties to achieve great things.
- b ☐ Explorers like Fiennes are selfish. They may need to be rescued and will put the lives of others at risk.
- c ☐ This expedition is of no value because the Antarctic has already been crossed at other times of the year.
- d ☐ Fiennes is an important symbolic figure. He is continuing the long tradition of human curiosity about the planet.
- e ☐ In the age of satellites, true exploration is dead because there is no uncharted territory on the Earth.

Explorers and adventurers



Edmund Hillary (right) and Tenzing Norgay



Ferdinand Magellan



Junko Tabei



Neil Armstrong



Vasco de Gama



Roald Amundsen

Answers

Before reading

1 The first (confirmed): a people to reach the summit of Everest b woman to reach the summit of Everest c man to stand on the moon d explorer to reach the south pole e person to sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific; his ship was the first to circumnavigate the globe (but he had died) f European to sail directly to India.
2 relax, stroll

While reading

1 c 2 d 3 a 4 b

2 a There is strong and evocative vocabulary including: appalling challenge, perpetual darkness, temperatures/plummet, awful place, freezing/starving to death.

b She describes the terrible nature of Scott's journey in paragraph two. Then

dramatically opens paragraph three by saying: "That journey was made in summer."

c Repetition of the first, the oldest etc.

d It is the ironic contrast of the "warm" temperatures of the Swedish Arctic compared to those mentioned earlier of -90C.

e The long sentence with numerous parts reflects the stages of the lengthy and arduous journey.

After reading

1 a consider b has crossed c has trekked d climbed e became f will attempt to g has done